

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Older Adults' Intentions to Utilize Mental Health Services: The effects of cohort membership

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Older adults have the lowest mental health utilization of any age cohort. This study compared baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964 versus older adults born in 1944 or earlier, on attitudes and intentions to utilize mental health services. Ajzen's theory of planned behavior and its related constructs of attitudes, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and intentions were used as a theoretical model. The Inventory of Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS) and Beliefs About Psychological Services (BAPS) were used for measuring the constructs in the theory of planned behavior. Gender and previous mental health service utilization were also measured. Participants ($n = 401$) included current and retired faculty and staff from a mid-sized Midwestern University. Statistical analysis, using MANOVA, found main effects for previous mental health experience and age cohort, but not for gender. Those with previous mental health service experience expressed more positive attitudes, intentions, and perceived behavioral control over receiving mental health services. Contrary to the primary hypothesis, the older adult cohort expressed more positive attitudes, greater

intentions, was less affected by the subjective norm, and had more perceived behavioral control than baby boomers. Regression analyses, using gender, previous mental health service use, attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control accounted for 55.7% of the variance in intentions for the older adult cohort and 58.2% for baby boomers. For both cohorts, attitudes accounted for the greatest amount of variance. Promoting positive attitudes through reducing environmental and economic barriers and increasing education regarding mental health services is likely to increase mental health service utilization in baby boomers and older adults.